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ABSTRACT

This research analyzes the results of a program to enhance the self concepts of junior high students. Subjects were 80 students identified as having low self concepts. They participated in an eight-week program to develop skills in personal and social awareness. Pretest posttest scores on the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory indicated that students who participated in the program showed a significantly greater gain in self concept than students not in the program. The results are encouraging for educators who wish to plan specific activities to develop more positive self concepts of junior high students. (Author)

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A Program to Enhance Self-Concept of Junior High Students

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Abstract

This research analyzes the results of a program to enhance the self-concept of junior high students. Eighty students identified as having a low self-concept participated in an eight week program to develop skills in personal and social awareness. Pre-test post-test scores on the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory indicated that students who participated in the program showed a significantly greater gain in self-concept than students not in the program. The results are encouraging to help educators plan specific activities to develop more positive self-concepts of junior high students.

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There has been a sharp increase in the number of studies in student self concept over the last several years (Shavelson, Hubner and Stanton, 1976). Research has confirmed the positive relationship between self concept and achievement (Brookover and Erickson, 1975), and there is general agreement that teachers and schools need to concentrate on developing positive self-concepts of all pupils. However, little research has examined specific strategies schools can employ to improve pupil self-concept. Some studies have been done to attribute changes in self concept to a treatment, but most of these studies have dealt with either disadvantaged or very young pupils, aged 4-10 (Ludwig and Maehr, 1967: Zirkel, 1971, 1972; Washington, 1976; Stenner and Katzenmeyer, 1976). Two exceptions are the work by Long, Ziller, and Henderson (1968), and Van Horn (1974) which examine factors affecting adolescent self-concept. Other researchers, notably Covington and Beery (1976) and Coopersmith and Feldman (1974) have suggested approaches teachers can utilize to develop more positive self concepts. Coopersmith and Feldman offer a theoretical approach which may be generalizable, and the factors they cite are examined in the discussion with respect to the specific procedures employed in the present study.

The purpose of the project, upon which the research reported here is based, was to improve the self concept of junior high pupils who were identified as having a low self image. The program focused on two aspects of self concept which are a primary concern of adolescents, how they are perceived by others physically (personal awareness) and the effectiveness of social interactions (social awareness). The program was developed to enhance skills in each of these areas to improve pupil overall self concept. Personal awareness included skill development in areas of personal hygiene,

grooming, and social mannerisms. Social awareness covered assertiveness training, values clarification and social communication skills. The program provided experiences over nine weeks through which students could examine each of these areas in relation to themselves.

Methodology

Sample:

The sample for this investigation was drawn from all 650 pupils enrolled in junior high school grades 7-9, situated in a middle class suburb of Denver, Colorado. All pupils completed the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory in the early fall of 1976. Pupils and teachers were also asked to complete a questionnaire which measured their perceptions of pupil self confidence in the specific areas of skill development stressed in the program. From these three sources of information eighty students were identified from the school as needing special help to develop skills in personal and social awareness. Approximately one-third of these 80 students participated in the program during the fall term, one third in the winter, and a third in the spring. Also, a random sample of students in a second junior high school, comparable to the first, was used as a control group.

Instruments:

The Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory was used as the pre and post test to assess change in self-concept over the year. This instrument has established validity and reliability for use with junior high school students (Coopersmith, 1967; Shavelson, Hubner and Stanton, 1976). Although there are several scales within this instrument, there is little empirical evidence

to support separate interpretation of the subscales (Shavelson, Hubner, and Stanton, 1976). Thus, the overall score was used, which indicates a personal judgment of worthiness in general, favorable judgments about themselves. The instruments used to gather additional information from teachers and pupils for identification of those who would be in the program were developed specifically for this project, and consisted of a check list to assess how often a pupil displayed behaviors characteristic of a positive self-concept.

Procedures:

Following the administration of the pre test,, students identified to be in the program were required to rearrange their class schedule to allow time during the regular class day to participate in program activities. Each student attended two class sessions each day 45 minutes long, for 9 weeks. One class period was devoted to developing the personal awareness skills and was coordinated by a female instructor, the other period was used for social awareness, and was conducted by a different female instructor. Both instructors were responsible for all three groups of pupils (fall, winter, and spring terms). Student activities for developing personal awareness skills included: Participation in group discussion; observing demonstration by resource specialists; viewing film presentations in the areas of personal hygience, grooming, social mannerisms and nutrition; and "hands-on" experiential approach to techniques involved in good grooming, social mannerisms and personal hygiene, covering such areas as facial, skin, nail and hair care, and good posture and table manners. Social awareness skills included: learning how to listen and converse with others in a group; learn to weigh

pros and cons and consequences of alternative actions; be able to express feeling openly and honestly; be able to speak positively about themselves and others; learn how to introduce others; and learn the process of valuing. Most of the sessions to develop these skills involved group sensitivity, discussion, and experiences to stimulate consideration of the areas. (More detailed explanations of specific sessions are available, please see reference note 1).

After each group of students participated in the program they took the Coopersmith Self Esteem Inventory as the post test. Thus, students in the first group took the post test in December, those in the second group in March, and those in the third group late May. The pupils in the second junior high school were given the post test in May. A random selection of students in the second school was made in the fall and spring by grouping mathematics classes by ability level and taking a random set of classes in each level. So that not all students in the first junior high school would have to take the post test a random sample was chosen in the same manner. This resulted in 158 students in the control school and 77 students in the school the program was administered in who took the pre and post test. A few of the 80 pupils were not included in the statistical analysis because they were in special education classes and there was not a comparison group available who did not participate in the program. This procedure made it possible to compare changes in the self esteem scores of pupils in the program, pupils in the same school not in the program, and pupils in a different school with no program.

Results:

A 1 x 5 ANOVA was performed on change scores of the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory, post test minus pre-test. Since students who participated in the program were chosen for their low scores, statistical regression could account for a greater positive change than the control groups. To control for statistical regression, the following formula was used to adjust the pre-test scores:

$$T_i = \bar{x} + rel.\ (x_1 - \bar{x})$$

where x_1 = uncorrected observation on the pre test

T_1 = corrected, true score observation on the pre-test

rel. = reliability of the measure (.88 for the Coopersmith)

$\bar{x}$ = sample mean on the pre test

This formula was developed by Porter (1976), and is explained for use by Campbell and Boruch (1975).

The means and standard deviations for the five groups are indicated in Table 1. The 1 x 5 ANOVA was statistically significant ($F_{(4,282)} = 2.20$, $p = .05$).

The greatest gain was by students in the first experimental group, a jump of seven points on the Coopersmith. The third experimental group also experienced a large gain, almost five points, but the second group's improvement was no better than the control students. Tukey post hoc comparisons confirmed that the first experimental group's change scores on the Coopersmith were significantly higher than the control students in the same school. Other comparisons were not statistically significant according to the Tukey procedure, but differences in direction are apparent and favorable toward

the experimental groups.

Since the Coopersmith pre test scores were obtained in the beginning of the school year and the last two programs began after January, some gain in the scores would be attributed to growth processes in the school generally, and mitigate the effects of the program. The second group, which did not show a significant gain, was described by the program administrators as a "troublesome" group. Evidently, there were problems with the group which prevented the program from having its intended effect.

Conclusions:

The findings of the study suggest that pupil self concept can be improved with special programs. The results, while limited to the students participating in the program and the nature of the sessions, are encouraging with respect to the need of educators to identify activities to enhance self concept, especially since it is difficult to find treatment effects on generalized measures of self concept like the Coopersmith. Recently, Coopersmith and Feldman (1974) have summarized several procedures which they believe can foster a more positive self concept in the school. These include acceptance of the child, appreciation of his strengths and acceptance of his weaknesses, trust in his ability to direct, motivate and reward himself, giving him an opportunity to choose among alternatives, providing a responsive environment in which he responds directly to materials and people rather than through the teacher; and providing a clear and definite set of responsible, realistic limits. In retrospect, it seems that the program implemented in this school did provide an environment with these definitions and expectations. It may have been successful because it stressed areas of personal and social awareness that adolescents are acutely

aware of, and dealt with them in a responsive, understanding, helping manner. The "hands-on" approach of the program gave students direct experience with various materials and personal concerns of high interest. In future research of this sort it would be valuable to assess the participant's perceptions of the conditions Coopersmith and Feldman advocate. This would help provide construct validity to the procedures employed and contribute to the generalizability ot the activities and sessions. The social awareness session stressed choosing among alternatives and mutual acceptance of strengths and weaknesses of all pupils. One interesting effect of the program was that many students wanted to be in the program who were not selected. Another was the increased awareness of parents, teachers, students and administrators of the need to develop positive self concepts of pupils.

This study shows that it is possible for schools to structure experiences which help students who have low self-concepts. The activities and organization of the program provides information for others who are concerned about developing self-concepts. The success of this particular program can be attributed to its focus on concerns of adolescents, and basing the activities on theorectical notions of the factors needed to develop a positive self concept more generally. It shows that a program outside of regular class, in small groups, may be an effective approach to enhancing self concept.

Table 1

Group means corrected for statistical regression and standard deviations

	Control Students in 1st Jr. High	Control Students in 2nd Jr. High	1st Exper. Group	2nd Exper. Group	3rd Exper. Group
Pre-test					
Mean	30.85	29.22	21.04	24.02	28.02
S.D.	5.9	7.5	5.5	5.04	6.2
Post test					
Mean	32.20	32.29	28.50	25.43	32.9
S.D.	8.6	7.4	9.0	7.8	6.4
Post test minus Pre test mean	1.34	3.07	7.45	1.41	4.90
S.D.	1.00	.75	1.01	.60	.75
N =	77	158	18	21	13

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Note 1: Further information concerning the specific activities of the program can be obtained by writing Dr. Charles Trebilock, Jefferson County Schools Lakewood, Colorado

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